

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 001871

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TAGS: PREF PREL PHUM TO GH BE
SUBJECT: TOGO NOT READY FOR REFUGEE RETURNS

REF: A. COTONOU 1084
B. LOME 1393
C. STATE 198938

Classified By: REFCOORD NICK HILGERT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B/D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: RefCoord met UN and government agencies in Lome and Accra from November 8-10 to discuss the Government of Togo's proposed National Repatriation Plan (NRP) and the UN's 2006 Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for Togo. UN and EU representatives stated security conditions in Togo were not yet acceptable to support refugee returns and UNHCR has not agreed to participate in organizing returns at this time.
END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Abidjan-based RefCoord and Poloffs met with UN and government agencies in Lome and Accra on November 8-10 to discuss the Government of Togo's proposed National Repatriation Plan (NRP) and the UN's 2006 Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for Togo. Poloffs Rona Rathod and Scott Ticknor accompanied RefCoord to several meetings. Meetings in Lome included UNDP, WHO, the European Union, and the Government of Togo's High Commission for Returnees and Humanitarian Action (HCRAH). RefCoord also met with UNHCR officials in Accra.

SECURITY CONDITIONS FOR RETURN

13. (C) Fidele Sarassoro, UNDP Resident Coordinator in Lome, stated that the same military and police officials who had engaged in electoral violence were still stationed in the same local districts and patrolling the same streets where the violence had occurred. He explained it was essential for UNDP to establish 25 Reception Committees outlined in the CAP 2006 before refugees returned as the main objective of the committees was to ensure that returnees would not be targeted for violence once in Togo. He hoped to organize an interagency evaluation team in the early part of December that would make a statement regarding security conditions in Togo.

14. (C) Gilles Desequelles, Charge d'Affaires at the European Union Delegation, stated that two conditions had to be met before the EU would support returns: resolution of the impunity issue and progress on national dialogue. He called the CAP 2006 document a "shopping list" and explained the EU Director for Development was preparing a letter to the Prime Minister stating the EU did not have any new money to fund returns. Desequelles was trying to insert language in the letter that reflected the two above conditions. Desequelles said he supported UNHCR's decision not to sign tripartite agreements with Benin and Ghana at this time as called for in the NRP, but did feel the EU would be able to contribute small amounts of money to projects from existing budgets should returns move forward in the future. The EU's main objective, he explained, was to pave the way for free and fair legislative elections, probably in early fall 2006.

GOVERNMENT OF TOGO'S REPATRIATION OFFICE

15. (C) Kokou Tcharie, the Government of Togo's representative at the High Commission for Returnees and Humanitarian Action (HCRAH), believed refugees in Ghana and Togo fell into one of four categories: persons who had committed violent acts during the demonstrations, persons afraid of more violence, persons who were looking for visas to the U.S., and persons who went looking for food. (Note: Desequelles said the Government had adopted a hard line regarding its interpretation of refugee motives following the release of a critical UN report on human rights abuses in Togo. End Note.)

16. (C) Tcharie shared a copy of the NRP with RefCoord and Poloff and explained the document was developed with the help of two UNDP consultants. He outlined actions taken by the Government to promote returns as described in the first part of the plan, all of which took place from August 10-28. Tcharie said that he had also proposed an amnesty law to the Prime Minister but that some objected to an amnesty that would protect government and military officials who had participated in the violence.

17. (C) Tcharie confirmed that it would be important to establish the 25 Reception Committees called for in the NRP before organizing returns. Although the NRP calls for these committees to be in place by September, Tcharie showed RefCoord and Poloff a letter he had prepared only now to send to the Prime Minister requesting approval for the composition of the 10-person committees.

WHICH PLAN TO FUND?

18. (C) RefCoord pointed out to Sarassoro that UNDP was submitting the same project under the CAP 2006 (the 25 Reception Committees) that was in the NRP, but with a slightly different budget. Sarassoro replied that it was the same project. However, Tcharie stated that he was seeking direct funding to the NRP, that the Committees would respond directly to him, and that he reported directly to the Prime Minister. He did not identify any particular role for UNDP and even suggested that direct funding to the NRP, rather than contributing to international organizations, would help ensure HCRAH's independence within the government.

UNHCR GHANA

19. (U) RefCoord and PolChief Scott Ticknor met Daniel Kamphuis and Jane Muigai, Protection/Resettlement Officers for UNHCR in Accra, on November 10. UNHCR estimates there are approximately 15,500 Togolese refugees in Ghana, primarily located in villages in the Volta region with smaller numbers residing in Accra or at Krisan refugee camp. Another 25,000 refugees are in Benin. Kamphuis pointed out that UNHCR would support returns when conditions were satisfactory in Togo, but that the decision as to the overall security situation in Togo did not rest with UNHCR. UNHCR Accra officials stated they had not yet made any plans in Ghana to organize returns in cooperation with UN agencies in Togo.

10. (C) UNHCR Accra claimed that HCRAH had "staged" 25 returns from Benin and broadcast statements from the false returnees on the poor conditions in Benin and the stable situation in Togo. They also stated that Ghanaian police had arrested four Togolese individuals posing as journalists trying to meet with the refugees.

COMMENT

11. (C) Agencies seem to have put the cart before the horse in Togo. The NRP, under normal circumstances, might be workable. The missing element in the plan so far is the clear participation of UNHCR, not to mention an expressed desire on the part of refugees to return, and neither the EU nor the UNDP stated that security conditions in Togo are ready for organized returns. Although an amnesty law might be useful, refugees will probably not return to Togo unless they believe the terms of all security guarantees will be respected.

This cable has been cleared with Embassies Lome and Accra.
Valle